

"YOUR" AND "OUR" IDEALS

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The concluding sentences of Mr. George Rabinoff's article, on page 52, of the last issue of JEWISH CHARITIES, are worthy of consideration.

"With the transient problem agreeably settled," says Mr. Rabinoff, "our people will have more confidence in our methods, and will more readily listen to and appreciate our ideals and efforts."

"How has this been met in other communities?" asks the article. "Hartford is by no means alone in its desire to be freed from oppression, and an answer to its difficulties will be welcomed by hundreds of communities."

If we are to construe the meaning of "met" as the equivalent of "settled," our answer would be that it has not been settled. Of course, it is being met by other communities in the best way and manner known to the individual having the matter in hand, but it is far from being settled. And the question should have been put to us point blank: "Why is it not settled?"

While the statements that "our people" will have more confidence in "our methods" and will appreciate "our ideals" is rather general, the fact that an illustration of the *Magid* and *Schnorrer* (I must confess I detest the term) was necessary to emphasize the difficulties, leads one to the conclusion that there must be an "other people" who are expected to appreciate "our ideals" and have more confidence in "our methods." And so, one is forced to the conclusion that Hartford, as well as any other community, is grappling with that time honored question of bringing the "other people" to accept the methods and ideals of "our people," which, in its plain significance, means the bringing together of the two factions of American Jewry, the modern and orthodox. And, as any other community, is devising means and ways to open the eyes of the orthodox Jew to see and appreciate the ideals and methods of the modern Jew. A wasteful undertaking, sister Hartford! Your labors will be lost. Other communities have tried it—are trying it; but all in vain.

What is the reason, we would like to know, that New York has no Federation of Jewish Charities? What is the reason that Chicago has two federations, one of them an orthodox Jewish Charities?

Did it ever occur to the writer of the article that these "other people" have, and they had them for a long time past, ideals and methods. But "our people" insists on forcing "our ideals and methods" on them, while very little, if any, heed is given to "their" ideals and methods. And "they" refuse to swallow it.

Blame them, you may, but it will not make them subscribe to "our" unless you appreciate and respect "their" ideals and methods, to a certain degree.

And since the *Magid* was mentioned as one of the many oppressors, let us analyze his case: He is fifty years old, and five years in America. His wife and five children live on Rivington Street, New York, or in Barditcheff, Russia. He is now going from city to city to earn a living for his family. (His own living is supplied by the local *Rav* or *Shochet* free.) His trade is to say something (always *Me-hinyuneh-de-yuma*. Current topics). He did "say" in the orthodox *Schull* on Sabbath afternoon, and Sunday the *gabai* gave him five dollars. This money he must send to his family, and he does it. His next problem is how to reach the next town where there is a Jewish community, and he comes to the office of the superintendent of the local Jewish charities. After telling his story he asks for transportation, and the superintendent tells him that it is impossible. "Why?" says Mr. *Magid*. "Because," says the superintendent, "we have a transportation rule which we are bound to obey, if we do not want to involve our charities in legal litigation. In these rules your class comes under the head of 'homeless men,' and 'our methods' are not to encourage this class to drift aimlessly from town to town. 'We' believe in helping one to help himself, and I can give you a position in the foundry, in order to make you self-supporting." The *Magid* is deeply touched

by this statement, and he says: "My dear Mr. Superintendent, you are perfectly right. You have 'your' chalk mark to go by and you must not deviate one inch from it. But, pray, what can I, what shall I do? Can't you see that I am no more responsible for what I am than you are for what you are? As well as you are a product of your training and environment, so also am I. My whole life was spent on the study of law. I spent my whole energy on this one thing, to be a *Lamdon*, a *Magid*. I did it because my dear father could find no other way of educating me. I was denied the right to enter any other school. I was denied the right, when I grew into manhood, to engage in any other legitimate pursuit. I was forced into this idle life against my own will, and, after suffering forty-five years, I heard of this blessed land, with its high ideals. I have heard much about our own Jewish people, how charitable they are. How they love and befriend the stranger, the downtrodden, the unfortunate brother. I heard they are having great *Zeducah* offices, of the Jews, by the Jews and for the Jews, and I came here not as a homeless man, but as a homeless man. I ask but a little help to enable me to send home at least five dollars a week. No! Mr. Superintendent, not one cent do I spend for something unnecessary. I do not drink; I do not gamble; I do not overdress. If you cannot do for me what I would like you to do, you can, at least, not say that I am oppressing you—not to class me with a class of men with whom I have nothing in common. Work! I wish I could work. I wish I were a tailor, a shoemaker, or physically strong enough to do a day's labor. But, can't you see I am unfit for it? Can't you see that I am hardly able to bear my burden as it is, without adding the stamp of idler on me?"

And this unfortunate *Magid*, being refused by the superintendent, goes back to the "other people." They do appreciate him. They do sympathize with him, and a collection is immediately taken up for him.

Wrong; of course it is. No red-handkerchief collections should be permitted, but it is "their" best way of helping a

brother and they are doing it every day in the year.

The writer had occasion to correspond with a gentleman in a neighboring city in regard to a man helped to reach his city, and the answer was curt: "It is up to the National Conference of Jewish Charities to make the proper provision for the adequate handling of the traveling *Magid*, not for us. This man had nothing to do here. And we helped him to go to you that you should help him."

Then we wonder why "they" persist in refusing to affiliate with "us." And we say they are unappreciative.

In dealing with this, my unfortunate, un-American and uncouth brother, I, many a time, blush, and am ashamed of myself: He knows and understands my business far better than I do. A Federation of Jewish Charities, a Hebrew Relief Association, to him, means what the terms imply, signify and include. He knows he is a Jew and a Hebrew, and the office of the Federation and Relief are there for him. Before entering my office he expects to find a Jew to greet him with a *Sholom Aleichem*; with an *Ochce Atto*. And watch his disappointment when he sees in me a stern, rigid, inflexible and matter of course dignitary, with a string of set, fixed rules and classifications, telling him that he must walk a chalk mark or good-bye. And I often wonder, why? Why do we call it a Jewish and a Hebrew? What do we mean by carrying these activities separate from the other, similar institutions in our city, if our problems and their solutions are identical with the problems and solutions of our friends, the Gentiles? And the fact that we do carry them separate from the others is in itself proof positive that our problems must be solved along different lines from the others, but we are not doing it. We insist on "our methods" and "our ideals."

We all hope, I am sure I do, that this vital question will be brought to the attention of the National Conference of Jewish Charities at its next meeting, and that some way will be found out by which we could return "back to the soil."